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ABSTRACT

Educational literature is replete with calls for changes in preparation programs for school administrators. This paper contrasts traditional administrator-preparation programs with one designed around the Quality Schools paradigm. The program emphasizes administrator candidate selection, human needs, the empowerment of others, effective communication, development of human resources, organizational change, and the effective planning and implementation of school improvement. Implemented in 1993 at the University of Wyoming, the program is comprised of the following components: a curriculum that integrates theory and practice, an internship experience, a cohort design, and an indepth screening and admission process. The program focuses on the role of administrators as "stewards" of themselves, their communities, and resources. (Contains 44 references.) (LMI)

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QUALITY SCHOOLS THROUGH QUALITY LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Educational literature is replete with calls for changes in school administrator preparation programs, asserting that programs need to better prepare administrators for dealing with school improvement. This paper contrasts traditional administrator preparation programs with one designed around the Quality Schools paradigm. This program emphasizes administrator candidate selection, human needs, the empowerment of others, effective communication, development of human resources, organizational change and the effective planning and implementation of school improvement.

The New Principal - Steward of the Covenant

For more than a decade, reformers have been touting collaboration among educational stakeholders as the most promising vehicle for school improvement. Mechanisms for the provision of collaboration are legion in public schools. In fact, many state legislatures have mandated the use of site-councils in making decisions at the school level. The inclusion of teachers, parents, students and other community members in K-12 decision making, if nothing else, implies an admission that school boards and administrators find little utility in using a Weberian, bureaucratic decision-making model in the operation of schools. The tendency to include those heretofore excluded from participation in policy decisions is a response to a number of stimuli, not the least of which is a political environment radically different than that which was present in the first half of the century. School boards and administrators are no longer necessarily trusted to do what is best with little scrutiny from their publics and increases in teacher political power and influence has also been well chronicled (Hanson, 1979; McDonnell & Pascal, 1979). Irrespective of the motives for inclusion, methods used in school governance today recognize that it is not viable to expect administrators and school boards to make decisions, sometimes from great distance, with a small amount of information, which are the best decisions for the organization.

Getting it right at the top.

Superintendents and school board members do not necessarily have a greater

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level of technical competence than teachers, parents or other members of the community, to make quality decisions that can be effectively implemented. Dolan (1994) described a dysfunctional management process which is predicated on "...getting an answer on strategy 'right' at the top and arranging all other components to hold it steady and carry it out." This military style of decision making simply does not work in public schools. Boards of education and administrators may impose their decisions on the system, but the relative autonomy of teachers to resist bureaucratically developed organizational goals often results in significant incongruence between the organization's stated goals, those espoused by the administration and the individual action of teachers (Lortie, 1969; Hanson 1979).

Widening access to policy making in schools is a response to the inevitable failure of hierarchical decision making practices of the past. For Abbott (1969), the traditional exercise of administrative prerogatives was not benign, but rather a serious inhibitor to the important contributions that could be made by teachers in improving schools if only administrators would modify their role and get out of the way. Abbott stated:

> It is highly unlikely that innovation will become common among members of the teaching force as long as teachers are subject to rigid hierarchical controls...I do suspect, however, that the educational administrator of the future will be more like the hospital administrator and less like the industrial tycoon, who appears to be our model today (p.49).

Over time, educational decision makers have come to realize that, in order for school improvement efforts to be successfully implemented, teachers and others must be a part of the planning process and decision making.

Reculturing and quality schools.

Organizational culture was described by Bower (1966) as, "The way we do things around here." Schein (1985) described organizational culture as "...a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope...that work well enough to be considered valid..."(p. 9). A culture contains the normative beliefs held by an individual regarding the expectations of others about his behavior as a member of a group or organization (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and those normative beliefs, held in common, by members of the organization (Homans, 1950; Mills, 1967).

The failure of educational reformers to understand the traditions and strongly held collective beliefs, the external and internal environments with which the organization must cope, and the intractable problems they must confront, has resulted in the failure of reforms that otherwise may have been successful (Fullan, 1994). Change agents often perceive complex organizations as mechanisms that can be influenced to change, without considering the organization's culture. Dolan (1994) used the analogy of an automobile that is difficult to start in the morning. In this example, the owner simply takes the car to an automobile repair shop, has a part replaced, and the car's performance is quickly restored. Dolan makes the case that organizations are not mechanical systems that respond to piecemeal repair or modification to improve their performance. If a leader expects to affect sustainable change, he or she must

first acquire an awareness of the organization's subsystems, their complex relationships with one another and the total system's linkage to its external environment.

Cultures are complex systems that learn and change, depending on their structure, environment and values (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). To further illustrate the difference between unpredictable, complex systems and simpler ones, Birnbaum (1988) used the analogy of a pool table and the action of billiard balls, within the finite boundary of the table. This simple, predictable system is set in motion when some, or all, of the billiard balls react to the kinetic energy imparted to them by the cue stick. When the energy is expended, the balls stop reacting and remain stationery until they are struck again. This relatively simple system of physics and geometric relationships is predictable. Birnbaum described complex systems in a different way and asked us to consider the difficulty of playing pool if "...each ball 'learned' from being struck and reacted slightly differently each time it was hit!" (p.35). Implementing change in complex systems can be a little "...like being in a maze in which the walls change with every step you take...Cause and effect in such systems often can be neither predicted nor adequately explained" (Birnbaum, 1988, p.35).

Discussions about a collective vision serve to reaffirm a fundamental belief system and provide a clarity of meaning for actors within the organization. Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest that to improve organizations, presumably including schools, "...we need to relearn old lessons about how culture ties people together and gives meaning and purpose to their day-to-day lives" (p.5). Saphier and King (1985) outline a number of critical elements in positive school culture that include honest open communication, interpersonal trust and confidence, an environment that tolerates mistakes, tolerance for experimentation, tangible support, involvement in decision making, valued traditions and an atmosphere of collegiality.

Planning processes that feature attainment of group consensus on key issues provide the opportunity to recreate school culture. Pivotal decisions on such issues as organizational beliefs, mission (purpose), clearly articulated educational objectives, established priorities, a set of operating principles and an implementation schedule, focus effort and help provide unity of purpose. Consensus building fosters open, honest communication, collegiality, develops trust and involves teachers and others in meaningful decision making far beyond the scope of site-based management and its more limited applications. True empowerment of teachers, parents, students and administrators requires collective involvement in setting the course for a school and sharing the vision for the future. Developing and supporting such a shared covenant is the truest form of empowerment (Sergiovanni, 1990; Sorenson, Machell & Berube, 1995).

The successful educational leader must understand their own belief system, learn about and understand the collectively held beliefs of members of the organization and facilitate the examination of the organizational covenant and lead others to work toward accomplishing goals which are developed consensually. The development of a set of compelling, commonly supported goals is a critical step in moving members of an organization toward meaningful change. Stacey (1992) advised us to continually create "...agendas of issues, aspirations, challenges and individual intentions" (p.146) of those within the organization. For Stacey, the critical element of an "...emerging strategy is the effectiveness with which managers in an organization build and deal with such agendas of

issues" (p.146). The change agenda must come from within the organization not from outside, predetermined by a leader. The crystallization of new beliefs for the organization (changing culture) is the cornerstone of discovering what Sergiovanni (1990) called a shared covenant, that is, agreement among organizational members on values, beliefs and goals essential to implementing and sustaining innovation.

Quality Schools - The Need For a New Administrator Preparation

The call for reconceptualizing the role of educational leaders can be heard on many fronts. Murphy (1990) argues that many school leaders are responsible for the current crises in education and that they are incapable of solving a variety of schools' problems. A substantial body of evidence suggests that we have prepared educators to behave in ways that preserve the current system of education - a system that does little more than accelerate the differences in the cognitive trends in sub-populations of children upon entry in the schooling system (Andrews, 1990; Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1986; Edmonds, 1978, 1979, 1982; Goodlad, Sirotnik & Soder, 1990; Heck, Marcoulides & Larsen, 1990; Smith & Andrews 1989; Soder & Andrews 1985). Calabrese (1991) takes the position that principal preparation programs must evolve to prepare graduates to face the leadership demands of a rapidly changing society and that the universities have an ethical obligation to act as a gatekeeper for schools and to ensure that quality practitioners are placed in schools. These new leaders must act as facilitators of change and school improvement, not custodians of past practices.

The role of the principal must change from that of autocratic decision maker and manager to that of empowerer of others and steward of a covenant of consensually agreed upon values, beliefs and operating principles which lead to an improved system. Expecting traditionally trained administrators to know how to assess and change school culture is unrealistic. Effective leadership focused on significant school improvement, requires skills and knowledge far beyond that provided by traditional preparation programs. The principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming contains components of several other emerging non-traditional programs (Milstein & Associates, 1993; Murphy, 1993). What follows is a description of the Wyoming program that contrasts current practice with that of more traditional approaches to principal preparation.

Preparation for Quality Leadership

In the fall of 1990, the faculty of the Educational Leadership Program Unit at the Univerisity of Wyoming began the process of examining alternatives to the traditional principal preparation program. The faculty entered into deliberations with selected representatives from various school districts throughout the state that were members of the Wyoming School-University Partnernship to strategically plan an alternative program for the preparation of school leaders. At the same time this process was taking place, the College of Education at the University of Wyoming was beginning to undertake the work of becoming a site for John Goodlad's National Center for Educational Renewal. This program's purpose was to design programs that would educate teachers and admininstrators to break away from a compliance system of education and become change agents with the school as a center of renewal.

Development and implementation of the new principal preparation program was accomplished over a three-year period of time with the assistance of a grant from

the Danforth Foundation. Components of the new non-traditional program include: (a) the development of an integrated proficiency-based curriculum that attempts to merge theory and practice, (b) an extended internship experience, (c) classes of students that entered and exited the program as a cohort group, and (d) an in-depth process for screening and selection of candidates to the program. (For a more detailed description of the development of this program see Machell, Berube & Sorenson, 1993).

The content of the principal preparation program is integrated into the following five themes: (a) Human Relations, (b) Organizational Management, (c) Personnel Development, (d) Educational Leadership, and (e) Communication. The content of traditional courses in Educational Administration, such as School Law, Organizational Theory, School Finance, and Supervision of Instruiction, has been integrated into these themes. This thematic structure of the curriculum lends itself to preparing future principals for the role of facilitator and steward of the covenant. A closer look at some of the processes, skills and knowledge included in the curriculum of the principal preparation program enable one to see how the role of steward is addressed.

Steward of self.

The approach taken in semester one of the program (Human Relations) focuses on each prospective leader learning how to relate in a positive manner with others by first coming to a deeper understanding of self. Students examine personal beliefs, values, traits and styles of interacting through the study of Leadership Theory and with the use of various instruments designed to identify personal traits and styles. Such an approach is consistent with the work of Deal (1996) who suggests that in order to be an effective leader, one who leads with soul, one must first know one's self.

Students are engaged in a series of activities designed to assist them in developing a personal vision and mission consisting of one's personal beliefs and values. In this way, students are in a position to work in a manner Covey (1989) describes as "inside out." The beliefs, values, and attitudes identified in the personal vision and mission provide a foundation for practice and make up what Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) refer to as an educational "platform."

Steward of community.

Once students begin to come to a deeper understanding of their personal traits and styles, they engage in activities designed to assist them in identifying how they tend to perceive and work with others. Commuication styles, decision-making models, conflict management, and other areas related to group process and team-building strategies are explored. Students explore issues related to climate, culture, and change with an emphasis on the development of the cohort group as a collaborative team. Students take part in the development of a cohort vision and mission as one way of modeling the work of the principal working with teachers, students, and parents in the development of a learning community. Thus, students create a shared covenant or agreement on values, beliefs, and goals for their cohort group. Such issues are introduced in the first semester of study and built upon in later semesters.

Empowerment is a major theme throughout the program that is explored in great detail in semester three (Personnel Development). Special emphasis is

given to traditional and emerging roles of teachers, students, parents, and administrators in the development of learning communities. Students engage in a variety of activities designed to enable them to reflect on personal experiences and examine the theory and literature related to organizational systems and procedures (i.e. teacher evaluation, staff development, supervision) which may enhance or hinder empowerment of various community members.

Steward of resources.

Yet another type of stewardship required of school leaders is to serve in the role of being a steward of resources. In semester two (Organizational Management) and semester four (Instructional Leadership) students focus on issues related to school law, finance, scheduling, facilities, and planning for school improvement (including all areas of teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment). Students participate in a variety of problem-based activities and simulations that enable them to apply group process skills learned earlier to planning for school improvement. Issues related to assessing climate and culture and planning for change introduced earlier in the program are revisited in the context of strategic planning and involving the community in school improvement efforts.

A Contrast of Methods

The previous sections outlined the content of the curriculum in the University of Wyoming Principal Preparation Program. Perhaps as important in defining a program for preparing quality school leaders are practices related to the following areas: (a) the roles of students, faculty, and practicing administrators, (b) methods of selecting students for admission to preparation programs, and (c) issues related to instructional methods, teaching, learning, and assessment of student growth. This section outlines each of these areas and contrasts features of traditional administration preparation programs with those of the preparation program at the University of Wyoming.

An important component of administrator preparation programs is how students and faculty view themselves, one another and the roles they play in the teaching and learning process. Traditionally, students have been seen as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by faculty, whose major role might be considered purveyor and transmitter of knowledge. The roles of students and faculty members in the preparation program at the University of Wyoming have been recast in such a manner that students are required to be active generators of learning and sources of knowledge and faculty members serve as facilitators of learning. Such roles reflect the theory and literature related to adult education and a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. (For more description of principles of adult learning, see Knowles 1978; For more information on constructivism, see Brooks and Brooks 1993).

Traditionally, practicing administrators have played only a minor role, at best, in the preparation of school leaders. In the preparation program at the University of Wyoming, practicing administrators play an important role in several respects. Exemplary principals from the field are identified and work with faculty to serve as facilitators of learning in classroom settings. Additionally, practicing administrators are identified to serve as supervising administrators and mentors for students as they participate in field-based experiences including administrative internships. In this way, students have the

opportunity to merge the theory learned in the classroom with practical realities of the principalship.

Another important component of administrator preparation programs deals with how prospective students are screened and selected into the program. Much has been written about poor admission practices in educational administration programs (National Commission for Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989; UCEA, 1987). Typically, admissions in educational administration are open and self-selecting, restricted only by traditional measures of admission to graduate schools, such as grade point average and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores.

The selection process developed at the University of Wyoming is reflective of many of the common features of principal preparation programs which employ both traditional and non-traditional criteria. Applicants must meet graduate school requirements (grade point average and GRE score) and complete an application. The application includes a statement of why the applicant wishes to participate in the program, a summary of educational background and professional experience, a resume, a nomination from a peer and a supervising principal, and three letters of recommendation. Applicants are then invited to participate in a day of screening activities on campus.

The screening activities consist of tasks designed to identify some of each applicants' traits related to educational beliefs, communication skills and group process skills. Screening activities include: (a) a writing assignment on a topic related to educational leadership, (b) a structured interview, (c) a leaderless group activity involving a group of five to seven participants who work through a case study describing a practical school problem, and (d) a one-to-one encounter in which each participant interacts with a faculty member who plays the role of an employee requesting assistance with classroom difficulties. Exemplary practicing administrators are invited to attend these screening activities, observe and interact with participants, and provide feedback related to observed strengths. Faculty members make the final selection decision by reviewing each applicant's performance on each screening activity, combined with GRE score, undergraduate grade point average, application materials and input from the practiticing administrators who attended the screening activities.

The philosophy and mission statement of the administrator preparation program at the University of Wyoming provides the grounding necessary to have a clear vision of the characteristics of an effective educational leader and how she or he behaves. Students selected into the program are those who share this same vision - one that should enable them to be compassionate, empowering, visionary change agents.

The final area of principal preparation outlined here addresses the area of instructional methods, teaching, learning, and assessment of student growth. In many traditional administrator preparation programs, the lecture method of instruction is predominant. Such an instructional strategy is closely connected to the perceived role of faculty members as transmitters of knowledge (described earlier). Closely related to the perceived role of student as receiver of knowledge (also described earlier) is the independent, competitive nature of classroom interactions and a focus on the "right" answer. This competition climate is also evident in traditional forms of assessments that rely heavily on paper and pencil tests that require short-term memorization, multiple choice

comprehensive examinations, and the assignment of letter grades along a "curved" normal distribution.

Instructional methods and practices related to assessment of student learning in the principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming provide a stark contrast to those of more traditional programs. Students play a much more active part as they are called upon to share with faculty members the role of facilitators of learning. As is the case in more traditional programs, students examine the knowledge base, literature and theory related to various aspects of educational leadership. In addition, students engage in a variety of problem-based learning activities including simulations, role-play experiences and analysis of case studies to apply and synthesize previously learned concepts. Many forms of authentic assessment, including demonstrations of competency and portfolio development, are employed which serve the dual roles of learning activities and methods of assessing student growth. A heavy emphasis is placed on encouraging students to become reflective practioners, including many opportunities for self-assessment.

The Affect of Quality Leadership on Quality Schools

Senge (1990) described five learning disciplines which are essential to effective leadership. Among these are systems thinking (organizing complexity into a coherent story), personal mastery (knowing oneself), mental models (examination of our assumptions, particularly 'The basic disease of the hierarchy'), shared vision (a common caring), and team learning (aligning and developing the capacity to create the results desired). Application of these disciplines to school improvement result in the creation of what Sergiovanni (1990) called the learning community. Sergiovanni stressed that before empowerment can be meaningful there must be agreement within the organization on a shared covenant. This agreement (covenant) defines the organization's vision (mission), quality of product (educational objectives), organizational priorities and operating principles. This represents a significant redefinition of the learning community. Sergiovanni (1992) asks us to consider some important questions in defining the "learning community." First, "what are the shared values, purposes and commitment that bond this community together?" Second, "what relationships among parents, students, teachers and administrators are needed for us to be a community?" Finally, "how will we work together to embody these values?" (p. 211). A collective and balanced response to these questions requires a form of participation in school policy much more inclusive than that which is offered in traditional school governance.

Quality school leaders must do more than simply involve others in decision making. The expanded involvement of teachers and others in school decision making will not, in and of itself, be enough to improve schools. Without underlying consensus of the purpose and function of schooling, superficial inclusion in school decisions will only serve to frustrate and confuse those participating (Taylor & Levine, 1991). Attempts to improve schools through successful implementation of innovative practices require consensus among those involved in the enterprise of teaching and learning on educational priorities and commitment to a partnership in which there is an active, positive interdependence among stakeholders.

In order for participation in decision making to be effective, it must

be a part of the school's new culture. Administrators, teachers, parents and students must create a vision for the school that authorizes and legitimizes action, enables action by removing obstacles and provides enhancement that in turn leads to a cycle of enhancement among members of the school community (Sergiovanni, 1990). Beyond empowerment, priority must be given to the enhancement of individual skills. Glasser (1992) estimated that about half of high school students are not meaningfully engaged in learning because the feel powerless and do not see instructional material to be relevant to their needs. It is logical to assume that other educational constituent groups (stakeholders) are also disengaged in school processes because they too have been held at arm's length in educational policy. The quality educational leader will find ways to engage those who feel powerless in the current system and enlist their support in achieving the shared covenant or vision. Dolan (1994) recognized that the process of restructuring our schools, for many administrators, violates one of the traditional, fundamental roles of administration, which "...is to protect at all costs, against any significant erosion of 'management rights'" (p. 78). The quality leader must be willing to abandon the traditional hierarchical model of decision making and adopt the characteristics that Glasser (1992) called a lead manager; Coercion is replaced with persuasion and problem solving. In Glasser's model, leaders involves others in the discussion of the quality of the work, models the work to be done, asks others to evaluate their own work and provides the best tools and work environment possible to do the work. In addition, the leader understands that others understand what quality is and can recognize it.

The quality school leader of the future will need to understand self, organizational culture, complex overlapping systems, change dynamics and must be a skilled communicator who is committed to development of others. The principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming is predicated on performance standards that directly address these skill areas. Through careful selection of administrative candidates, an integrated curriculum, constructivist instructional methodologies and student self-evaluation, students hopefully leave their preparation experience with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of quality leadership.

Remaining Issues

The principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming has met with significant positive reaction from students and practicing administrators in the region. Graduates seeking employment as principals have been successful and those hiring these graduates have reported their satisfaction with the preparation provided these new administrators. Although the results of participation have been quite positive, the faculty is committed to continual improvement of the program. What follows are areas of focus.

Working on the system.

The faculty of the Unit of Educational Leadership at the University of Wyoming try to model the attributes of Glasser's (1992) lead manager who, according to Glasser, should be working on the system while students work in the system. Dialogue in the form of debriefing sessions after instructional episodes provide important feedback to faculty regarding the effectiveness of practices and the student responses to faculty facilitation of learning. As work on the system progresses, a number of topics related to curriculum,

activities, and methods of content delivery are regularly under discussion.

Selection of students.

The selection criteria described above are often scrutinized by faculty for their ability to discriminate those with considerable potential for educational leadership from those with fewer skills and less potential. Maturity and commitment are two areas that, although seen as critical to success in leadership, are very difficult to assess. Chronological age and professional experience are sometimes poor predictors of professional maturity. Inteview questions which are intended to reflect on commitment to educational leadership and school improvement may elicit socially desirable responses from applicants rather than reflect their true beliefs.

The selection process can also be seen as elitist and contrary to the belief that everyone can learn and change their professional perspective. The failure to select a candidate recommended by a prominent administrative practitioner can often cause political pressure and negative responses to the leadership program from the field. Internal politics can also be an issue if a cohort group is selected that is relatively small, thereby generating limited tuition revenue for the college and university. Pressure to maintain larger classes flies in the face of careful selection and high standards.

Finally, there is a concern that application of selection criteria causes faculty to miss applicants that who would make good educational leaderss but were slightly below the 'benchmark' score on a number of criteria. In any given population of applicants there are clearly those who do not have the requisite skills and attitudes to become effective leaders; however, at the margin, are good people with potential being overlooked because they did not perform well on screening activities?

Assessment of student work.

Another area which needs constant attention is the assessment of students' work. The utilization of student reflection and self-evaluation notwithstanding, there is sometimes contention between student self-evaluation, that is, the degree to which a student feels they have met the standard of quality work as deliniated in the student/faculty developed grading rubric and the perceptions of faculty members. Some students are more candid in self-evaluation of their work than others.

Constructivist practices and the cohort dynamic.

Students are often asked to reflect on their role in the cohort learning experience by determining for themselves if they "brought wine or water to the table." As with any cooperative learning situation, equity of effort is occasionally problematic. Although cohort members, after several semesters together, become more skilled at offering feedback to their colleagues, faculty sometimes wonder about the issue of commensurate effort within the groups.

Tuckman (1965), in describing the development of learning groups, referred to the "storming" stage which can be exemplfied by conflict, resistance and rebellion. Juxtaposed to the application of constructivist

learning theory by faculty, in which students are asked to take responsibility for their own learning and demonstrate some creativity in meeting performance standards, conflicts over lack of structure are not uncommon. Although many cohort groups, over time, reach a level of group described by Tuckman as the "performing" stage where the group is proficient in working together toward a common goal, some cohorts have been delayed in their development due to an apparent lack of commitment or poor interpersonal skills. Although the cohort experience has been shown to be a powerful component of the program, improvements can be made by better providing for the needs of individual cohort members and more aggesively facilitating group development.

Summary

Educational leadership today requires skills, knowledge and attitudes that are remarkably different than those required only a few decades ago. The school principal should be the facilitator of school improvement and the keeper of a collective covenant, rather than the custodian of the status quo. She or he must be a builder of relationships among a number of constituencies including teachers, students, parents and the community at large. Helping the organization and its stakeholders identify their commonly held beliefs, values and educational objectives and planning a manageable method by which these objective can be attained is the work of educational leadership.

The current debate as to whether schools are really failing their students at a national level is not as relevant an issue as the collective assessment of student performance by those investing precious resources in their local schools. Educational stakeholders in every local district and school should be asking themselves how they can improve what is being done to and for students in their community. Quality leaders will play a key role in asking the right questions, gaining consensus in the results and facilitating progress toward commonly identified educational priorities.

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